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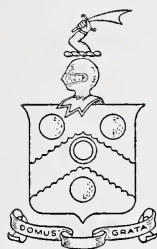


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Captain George & Lady Ann

ONE hot summer morning—August 16, 1643—at Roxbury, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a 25-year-old widower was standing with folded arms watching his wife's coffin being lowered into her fresh-dug grave. Among his kneeling family and friends he stood there, starkly in the bright sunlight, his feet propped wide apart, his fists tightly clenched.

For all that he heard, the voice of the Puritan pastor raised in prayer might have been the buzzing of a bee busy among the hollyhocks beyond the churchyard wall.

"Our beloved sister in Christ . . . ashes to ashes and dust to dust . . . unto Thee, our Father in Heaven . . . rest in peace . . . look down with compassion upon her motherless babes . . . Thy will be done. . . . Amen."

The congregation struggled awkwardly up from their knees. Still young George Denison stood there, stock still, staring at the rough pine box. The first shovelful of earth fell on the coffin with a hollow thud.

Starting suddenly, he wheeled about and shouldered his way roughly through the circle of his neighbors. Clear of the crowd,

he leaped forward in long, swinging strides and ran out of the churchyard, headed towards his home.

All Roxbury witnessed this astonishing performance. It was a fine midsummer day, perfect for haying, and the second crop of grass waved in the meadows beckoning the scythe. In the gardens, too, the gherkins, beets, and onions were all ripe for pickling. These were all imperative tasks. Yet, putting them aside, everyone gathered in the burying ground for the funeral of one of the town's most popular young matrons. In 1643 in Massachusetts, a death or a birth were not merely a date to be checked by some scrupulous genealogist. They were vivid events touching everybody, drawing all the people closely together.

They all knew young George Denison well. Half his 25 years had been lived in their midst, for he had come to Roxbury in 1631 with his parents and his two older brothers from Stortford, England. His father, William Denison, was described as a man of "goodly estate" and "well aware of the things of the spirit." He must have been both. He sent his three older boys to Cambridge: the eldest, a clergyman who was married had remained in England. On the long voyage across the Atlantic he engaged the Rev. John Eliot—later famous as the Apostle to the Indians—to tutor his youngest boy.

George was apt pupil. His penmanship was neat, and if his spelling was erratic, he learned at least to use the English language effectively. The love poem he wrote to Bridget Thompson, several petitions he addressed to the Connecticut General Court, and his will—widely different compositions that have been preserved—are each well expressed.

Doubtless too, he learned from his tutor a friendly interest in the Indians. Years later, this lesson saved the lives of many Connecticut colonists. Through Denison's influence the Pequots and Mohegans stayed friendly to the English when King Philip and his Narragansetts went on the warpath.

To the Honored Genrall Court now sitting in Hartford
 the Humble request of George Denison humbly sheweth
 that whereas about two years since there was a fine imposed
 upon me by your authority, the which is at your pleasure there
 to remit or require at your pleasure as you see cause:
 since which time it hath pleased allmighty God in his divine pro-
 vidence by these unhappy wars, to put an opportunity into my
 hand, by your authority and commition to give testimony of my
 fidelity and readiness to serve the Country: wherein I have redi-
 ly ventured both life and estate for the publick interest, not a
 little to the damage of my weak estate, yet nothing so gene-
 rous or difficult but I have bin willing to undergo, and undertake
 whereby I might serve God and the interest of his people, especially
 being countinanced by your authority, and incouraged by the pre-
 sencing and suckluding presence and good hand of the Lord of host
 with us in our weak endeavors to the terror and feathering of the
 enemy, to his Glory be it now spoken, and kept in memory to his
 praise: now may it please you so far to take notice of me in
 my weak, but faithfull endeavors to serve you, as to remit
 the aforesaid fine imposed upon me; and also to give me those
 three Indians which Capt mason left with me, and have since
 bin confirmed unto me by the Council at Hartford, to wit one
 anchant quia with his Wife and his child of about five
 years out, the which is all that I have of the effects of the
 war these persons, plunder or incomes: whereby you
 will yet further oblige him unto your service who is
 Gentleman loves to serve in what he may to
 his power George Denison
 Hartford may the 17. 1677

CAPTAIN GEORGE DENISON'S PETITION

to the General Court of the Connecticut Colony at Hartford, May 17, 1677; written in his own hand. For a transcription see at the end of the Bibliographical Notes, in the rear of this book.

As a boy growing up in Roxbury, tall, lanky George Denison with bristly sandy hair and gray-blue eyes, was a favorite with the young people. Because he had ideas and the instinct of leadership, the boys followed him. The girls liked him because he was bold and merry, a great jokester. The older people regarded him as a rather bumptious lad, headstrong, not easily fitted into the straitjacket of Puritan conformity.

His marriage with Bridget Thompson had been a true love match. Everyone knew that. She was an attractive, high spirited girl, the only child of a widow whose husband, John Thompson, "gentleman of Preston, Northamptonshire," had been dead several years. It was in her home in Roxbury that George and his bride started housekeeping. Three years later, when Bridget died leaving two baby daughters, Sarah and Hannah, the whole town wondered what the young widower would do. No one guessed even remotely close to what was to happen.

Straight from his wife's funeral George Denison ran to saddle his best horse and ride away. Without drawing rein he galloped to Boston where he bought some clothes, a comb, a razor and a cake of soap, and embarked on a ship sailing for England next day at the flood of the morning tide.

II

MANY times during his adventurous life George Denison was to display his impetuous nature. He loved Bridget dearly and the womenfolk of Roxbury, with maybe a dash of sentimentality, made this romantic excuse for his untoward flight. The men were cynical. In deserting his baby daughters, as they pointed out, he also left behind his mother-in-law. She was a bustling, buxom widow, a capable housewife, but—! It is possible that these motives blended, prompting him to escape from the small Puritan town to seek adventure in the home country.

At all events, immediately on landing, he enlisted in Cromwell's Army.

All England was torn apart by the bitter, bloody conflict between the King's royalist forces and the Parliamentary army under Oliver Cromwell: the battles of the "Cavaliers" and the "Ironsides" destined to be climaxed four years later by the execution of Charles I. In the grave of that badly advised monarch were buried, too, the last claim to the divine rights of any British king.

Amid the exciting reports of these turbulent events odd bits of news of George Denison in England drifted back to Roxbury. He had been promoted to Captain in the cavalry. In the battle of Marston Moor, July 1644, he had fought bravely, maybe desperately, since he was taken prisoner. He had escaped. A year later, in the decisive engagement at Naesby, he was badly wounded.

For his recovery he went to Ireland. After the ruthless stamping out of the Irish rebellion, the English Parliament had appointed George's uncle, Edward Denison, to the highly responsible, thoroughly unpopular post of Deputy Governor with headquarters at Cork. Thither the wounded nephew went, finding lodging in the home of well-to-do John Borodell, a merchant in leatherwares.

Word reached Roxbury that young Captain Denison had married again. It was rumored that his bride was a titled Irish beauty of fabulous wealth. The facts were somewhat less colorful.

Like many another man, Captain Denison had fallen in love with his nurse, Ann Borodell, his host's daughter. She was well born: her father was in all probability a younger son of a junior branch of the family of the Lords Borrodale. Nor was she penniless: her brother, as was the custom of the time, settled upon her a dowry of £300, which her husband later acknowledged in a deed filed in Hartford. Later she inherited in her own right several houses on a good residential street in Dublin. And she

was certainly a real beauty, quite as lovely as rumor had described her; tall and slender, with a peaches-and-cream Irish complexion, wavy brown hair and deep blue eyes.

Though no daughter of a belted earl, Ann Borodell was so truly a gentlewoman, so gracious, so kindly, that instinctively her friends called her "Lady Ann." She carried this charming nickname from Roxbury to New London to Stonington: all her life she was known to her neighbors as "Lady Ann."

In June 1646, just short of three years after he had abruptly fled from Roxbury, George Denison returned with his new wife. He received a hero's welcome. Governor John Winthrop noted in his diary the return of "the young captain recently come out of the wars in England." The bumptious lad was promptly admitted a freeman of the town, the official seal of citizenship. He was now twenty-eight; his wife three years older. They collected little Sarah and Hannah from the girls' grandmother Thompson, and on July 14, 1646, their own first child, a son, John, was born, followed on May 20, 1649, by a daughter who was christened Ann.

III

SO Captain George and Lady Ann settled down for four happy, uneventful years, the only years when his name does not appear in some official record. He was now the happily married father of four children, owner of a house lot in Roxbury and 500 acres of farm land; headed, it seemed, to follow his two older brothers' footsteps to a position of responsible leadership in the colonial community.

Daniel, the eldest of the three, married a daughter of the Massachusetts Governor Thomas Dudley and moved to Ipswich. Here he became a leading citizen, the town's representative in the General Court for many terms, the first Major General of the Massachusetts militia. Edward, four years older than George,

had also married into a prominent family, the Welds. At Roxbury, where he lived and died, he was elected to almost every public office from Brander of the Cattle to High Sheriff.

Both these brothers were survived by a son, but they had no grandsons. Thus George Denison, through the three sons that Ann Borodell bore him, John, George, Jr., and William, became the sole founder of the Denison family in America.

In England, the Denisons were of the squirearchy, a county family of the landed gentry. Their coat-of-arms, granted in the 14th century, indicates in the symbols of heraldry a Crusader and naval service. In the old records the name is spelled sixteen different ways, including such queer combinations as *Denicon* and *Dennysen*. The double *n* spelling, familiar in the United States, is said to have been adopted by the Irish branch established by Uncle Edward.

Akin to Johnson, Wilson, and scores of similar old English surnames, is Denison, son of Denis, the patron saint of France. It suggests that the first English Denison landed with William the Conqueror. However, long, long before 1066 the name *Denisca*, signifying a Danishman, appears in the old Anglo-Saxon Hundred Rolls. So possibly the first Denison leaped ashore from the dragon prow of a Viking longship.

Norman soldier or Danish pirate, somewhere in the past there must have been a biologically prepotent ancestor: a bold, brave man, a big man with sandy red hair, blue eyes under bushy brows, with a large, high-bridged nose and jutting jaw. George Denison was just such a man. Even today the family recognizes this description of him as the true Denison type.

George Denison's uneventful career in Roxbury was interrupted in 1650. A new captain was to be elected commander of the Train Band, the militia company in which every Massachusetts male between 16 and 60 must drill regularly. The young men supported him for this post. Their elders, remembering boy-

ish pranks and the inexplicable desertion of the baby daughters, favored a more stable character, and Denison was beaten by a close vote. He felt that his military rank and experience well qualified him for this important office, and he took his defeat badly. In a gust of anger he left for the new settlement in Connecticut at Pequot.

This town at the mouth of the Thames River, which we now call New London, had been established six years before, in 1644, by John Winthrop, Jr., with permission of the Massachusetts Colony. The defeat and almost annihilation of the warlike Pequot Indians by Major Mason had opened the foreshore of Connecticut to settlement and the younger Winthrop was promoting the plantation vigorously. The so-called Welsh Party with their pastor, the Rev. Richard Blinman moved in from Cape Ann. The town was formally organized and was transferred to the jurisdiction of Connecticut by the Commissioners of the United New England Colonies, two members each from Massachusetts and Plymouth, Connecticut and New Haven.

IV

GEORGE DENISON's feelings, outraged by the Roxbury election, were sweetly salved at New London where he was promptly named captain of the Train Band. In the frontier community this was no honorary commission. Three times during the next two years the drummer paraded the hilly streets of the riverside town beating out the alarm that called the Train Band to active duty. Against these threats of Indian attack the Captain planned his defenses with professional skill. He stationed his men, with an ample supply of ammunition, at three strategic outposts and gathered the women and children for safety in the church and two nearby houses. The attacks did not come, but Denison's energy and ability soon made him an im-

portant man at this outpost of the colonists. He was allotted a choice house lot of six acres on what is now Hempstead Street where he built a house later known as the old Chapman house now long since vanished. He was also granted twenty acres of marshland for grazing his cattle.

In 1654 the local records contain three curiously contradictory entries about Captain George Denison. He was commissioned Inspector of the Port of New London, a political plum with juicy fees. He was granted 200 acres of land for services to the community. And he was fined 24 shillings for selling strong waters to an Indian.

His land grant was in the country of the vanquished Pequot Indians whose stronghold on the Mystic River had been wiped out twelve years before. Behind the hills flanking the Mystic to the east lies another valley. Through this winds a brook called by the Indians Pequotsepos, the little river of the Pequots. Here was George Denison's land and here on a rocky knoll overlooking a great meadow with a glimpse of the ocean beyond, he erected a little lean-to and surrounded it with a stout stockade. Here, in 1654, he brought his wife, their two sons, John and George, their daughters, Ann and Borodell, and the two little girls by his first wife, Sarah and Hannah. At Pequotsepos another son, William, and two daughters, Margaret and Mary, were born.

The Pequot country was real frontier. The men who first moved into this rock-strewn land between the Mystic and the Pawcatuck Rivers were independents. They had to be rugged.

The first settler, William Chesebrough, a gunsmith, came in 1649 from Rehobeth in Plymouth because he had been accused—falsely, he always maintained—of selling firearms to the Indians. He picked a site at the head of Wequetequock Cove where there was a well sheltered landing place and open meadows for grazing and cultivation. East of him on the Pawcatuck, Thomas

Stanton built his Indian trading post. A monopoly of trade in furs with the Indians was a sort of bonus to the salary of \$25 a year paid by the Connecticut colony for his services as official interpreter. Walter Palmer, a six-foot giant, 68 years old, settled close beside his friend Chesebrough, and Palmer's son-in-law, Thomas Miner, took up land four miles westward at Quiambaug Cove.

To the west, between Denison's land and the Mystic, Captain John Gallup, Jr., was granted 300 acres for his and his father's services in the Pequot War. From Gallup's grant to Stanton's was twelve miles. Thus Stonington was the first settlement in New England that was not built clustered together about a village green and church for companionship and defense.

Three hundred years ago in Connecticut if a family did not regularly attend church, it was a serious matter. The friendly hobnobbing of the whole community was the social event of the week. All the local news, spiced with gossip, was exchanged, and here too, a man with a surplus of dried peas could find someone ready to barter corn or a firkin of butter or a bag of wool. Other serious business was afoot. With giggles and guffaws the young people were choosing their life partners. Not for nothing was the church called the "meeting house." Furthermore, a family that did not attend divine service Sabbath after Sabbath might rouse dangerous suspicions. A loose or spiteful tongue could let slip a word that would grow into grave charges.

The Pawcatuck settlers lived eight to twenty miles from New London. There was only a rough Indian trail connecting and two big rivers, the Mystic and the Thames, to cross. The pioneering families were devout Puritans, but they could not easily attend services there, and they were boiling mad when the General Court of the Colony ordered them to pay tithes for the support of the New London church and its pastor. The first spark of "taxation without representation" kindled brightly.



Twice they had appealed to the New London authorities for relief: twice they had petitioned the General Court at Hartford for the right to establish their own church. Four times they were blankly refused. So they met at Thomas Miner's, near the center of their scattered settlement, and their angry protests and noisy threats expressed their dismay and frustration. George Denison threw this practical proposal into their heated discussion.

"Since it is exceeding unlikely that our cause at Hartford shall come to a happy issue, let us address our petition to the General Court at Boston."

It was a bold plan, but a shrewd one. "By right of conquest" in the Pequot War, Massachusetts claimed all the territory east of the Thames. It was a thin claim since the Massachusetts militia company had arrived after Mason and his ninety Connecticut men had destroyed the two Pequot forts. But the case was now before the Commissioners of the United Colonies, and a petition from the inhabitants of this disputed region to be taken under the Bay's jurisdiction was sure to be welcomed at Boston.

On the other hand, such a move would infuriate everyone in Connecticut. Denison's rebellious proposal therefore called forth some loyal criticism. However, the chances of its success seemed good. Moreover there was also the hope that it might prod Hartford to favorable action.

So, George Denison wrote the memorial begging "that you would please to accept us under your Government & grant unto us the Liberties & privelages of a Township." It was signed: George Denison, Walter Palmer, John Gallup, William Thomson, Thomas Stanton, "For the rest of the Inhabitants and with their consent."

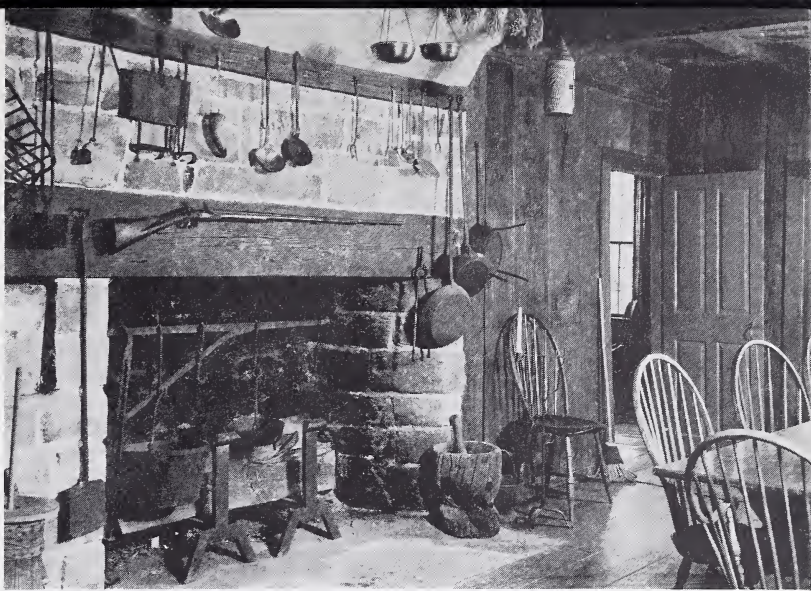
Being its instigator and because his brother was the son-in-law of Governor Dudley of the Bay Colony, the Captain was elected to deliver this petition. At daybreak next morning, October 16, 1657, he set off on his two days' ride to Boston.

He was warmly welcomed and entertained hospitably. He met all the Puritan bigwigs and delivered his petition into the hands of the Governor himself. This cordial reception must have been a comfortable interlude from life within a stockade, a vacation from chopping away at the primeval forest and building stone walls to clear his land for the plow. Properly impressed, he rode home elated by the feeling that a favorable reply was as good as in his saddlebag.

However, following the dictates of intercolonial politics, the Massachusetts magistrates wrote discreetly advising the petitioners to set up their own local government. Thus coached in rebellion, Denison and his neighbors drew up a sort of dry-land Mayflower compact, "The Asotiation of the Poquatuck People," effective June 30, 1658.

Massachusetts also used the Pawcatuck petition to bolster her claim to the Pequot territory. The Commissioners of the United Colonies—four each from Boston and Plymouth and from Hartford and New Haven—being naturally deadlocked

THE COLONIAL
KITCHEN



over this boundary dispute, found a compromise. They split the contested area in half at the Mystic River: to the west, Connecticut; eastward, the Pawcatuck country which is now Stonington township, to Massachusetts.

In 1662, the new charter of King Charles II settled all arguments. It fixed the colonies' boundary at the Pawcatuck River. Off again, on again—the Pawcatuck country, rechristened Stonington, was automatically returned to Connecticut.

V

DURING the four years of the Massachusetts regime, Captain Denison was top man within the jurisdiction. He headed the five-man committee in charge of local affairs, was one of the three commissioners "to try small causes," and served as Clerk of the Writs. He was also authorized to perform marriages. His powers were extraordinarily inclusive: he used them in a high-handed, partisan manner. He made a treaty with Ninigret, a Niantic Indian the English distrusted with reason. Ignoring former Connecticut land grants, he issued new titles and shuffled old boundaries. Among his grants were two generous ones to Harvard College and several to influential Bay men. In this region of cloudy land titles, these conflicting claims



PEQUOTSEPOS
MANOR

caused bickering and lawsuits among the inhabitants for many years.

Connecticut welcomed the rebels back with a general pardon to which there was one exception. George Denison was denied civil rights and fined £20. He not only refused to pay the fine, but he continued to perform marriages. The Court then ordered him to post a bond of £100 and to appear in Hartford at the next session. Three sessions went by and the Captain, stubbornly firm, did not appear.

His brazen defiance won both friends and enemies. To the bolder spirits the doughty Captain openly personified their smouldering resentment against the Hartford authorities. Others, more cautious and diplomatic, saw that this private war was bad for the whole community. All agreed that it was unwise for the Colony to alienate so able and influential a man. Two years later, having come to this conclusion, the Court at Hartford remitted its uncollectable fine and extended to George Denison indemnity "upon the same grounds as was formerly granted to the other inhabitants of Stonington."

But the Captain's belligerent mood persisted. For years he delighted to annoy the Honorable Court with niggling claims and extravagant complaints. Many pages of its closely written

records are filled with his legal battles. His long suit over the line between his land and his neighbors', the Widow Hannah Gallup and her son, John, Jr., started a family feud that lasted for generations.

Right within their stockaded home Captain George and Lady Ann had troubles of their own. Their pretty seventeen-year-old daughter, Ann, caught the fleeting fancy of a plausible scamp. John Carr had been mixed up in some pretty unsavory troubles—breaking jail twice, getting drunk and disturbing the peace with two Indian comrades, and being sued for breach of promise by a widow old enough to be his mother.

The Captain hailed this unsuitable suitor before the magistrates, charging him with "engaging the affections of his daughter, Ann, without leave; of taking a cap, a belt, and a silver spoon from his house; and of defaming said daughter." Carr recanted his slanders, but he was fined a whopping £24, 7s, 6d. He skipped bail and fled and vanished.

These scandalous proceedings evidently touched daughter Ann but lightly. Next year she married Deacon Greshom Palmer, son of the pioneer, and they raised up in the fear of the Lord a family of nine lusty Puritans, five sons and four daughters. Only one of them died in infancy, something of a record in those days.

THE COLONIAL
BEDROOM



Despite his difficult disposition, George Denison's abilities could not be denied. His neighbors appointed him to mark the new town's boundaries and to lay out the road from the Pawcatuck to the Thames, "following so closely as it is possible the Indian path." It is a highway still known as the Pequot Trail.

The Commissioners of the United Colonies named Denison, along with the interpreter, Thomas Stanton, and James Avery of Groton, a committee to set aside 8,000 acres for the remnants of the Pequot tribe—our first Indian reservation. The land they selected did not please the English settlers. They wanted the Indians placed further back country in the rocky hills, well removed from the settlements. The question was bitterly argued for years. Denison and Stanton stood by the Indians, supporting their rights trying to get them a square deal—none of which pleased their fellow colonists.



THE ROAD CHURCH

Denisons have been prominently identified with the First Congregational Church of Stonington ever since September 10, 1674 when Lady Ann was a "pertaker" at the ordination of James Noyes who was pastor for 55 years. The present building (the third on this site) was dedicated October 29, 1827.

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

The parish church of Stortford was established in the 11th Century and the present beautiful building was erected about 1400. The bells were hung in the tower in 1431. Here Denisons were parishoners for generations and here Capt. George was baptized December 10, 1620.



During this period, Denison appeared to delight in jumping into any and every dispute. Generally he chose to fight on the minority side, but at last he took up a thoroughly popular cause. Even his chronic critics at Hartford applauded him.

VI

ALMOST from the first settlement, Stonington men had taken up land across the Pawcatuck River. They grazed goats and horses there, cut hay, even planted turnips. Now families from Rhode Island began coming in, and at the ford where the Pequot Trail crossed the river they started the town of Wester-

ly. Connecticut protested officially: still the Rhode Island settlers thronged in. There were several border incidents, climaxed when Thomas Stanton was ejected forcibly from hayfields he had fenced twenty years before. Denison literally took up the cudgels. He led a score of indignant Stoningtonians in a raid during which they roughly handled several of the newcomers and carried off three prisoners who were charged with trespass.

Suddenly all these contentions and rivalries were forgotten. A bloody Indian massacre sent chills of horror and fear down every New Englanders' spine. The unneighborly colonies were shocked into united action.

June 24, 1675, had been declared a day of public fasting to avert this very tragedy. But as the little congregation of Swanze in Massachusetts stepped from their church they met a blast of musketry. One fell dead and several were wounded. A score of shouting savages, terrifying in warpaint and feathers, burst from their ambush and disappeared into the forest. That afternoon, greatly reinforced, they attacked both ends of the village simultaneously. Several homes were burned. Eight of the inhabitants brutally tomahawked. King Philip had declared his war of extermination against the white settlers.

Like Sassacus, the Pequot sachem of a generation before, Philip was convinced that the coming of the English meant the going of his people. He tried to enlist the neighboring tribes in this desperate cause. Again the plot was betrayed to the colonists. Forty years before, Roger Williams dissuaded the powerful Narragansetts from joining the Pequot conspiracy. Now, Stanton and Denison persuaded the tribes of the foreshore of Connecticut—Pequots, Mohegans, and Niantics—to become active allies of the English. Saved from attack in the rear, the people of Stonington still faced the battlefront just across the Pawcatuck River.

George Denison, now 56 years old, and his three sons were

among the first volunteers. The Connecticut troops, under Major Robert Treat, rendezvoused at Norwich and soon moved their headquarters closer to the front at Denison's palisade. Here the Stonington company, commanded by Denison and Captain John Mason, Jr., had been mustered in.

The Indians struck with terrifying success in western Massachusetts. The massacres at Deerfield and Hatfield urgently called Major Treat and his Connecticut troops to the rescue. Seventy men of the New London companies were left to guard the home front and they took part in the Great Swamp Fight near Kingston, Rhode Island, December 19, 1675. Although Philip and some 300 braves escaped, the greater part of his warriors were killed, but the New London contingent paid highly for this half-victory. Captains John Gallup, Jr., and James Avery and some twenty of their men were killed. Many were wounded and more were disabled by frozen feet and hands. On their return, they were honorably discharged with the thanks of the Colony. The disbanding of the New London companies left the Stonington front without organized defenses.

Heavy responsibilities were now placed upon Captain George Denison. He was appointed Provost Marshal of the New London and Narragansett countries, charged with the defense not only of the Connecticut frontier, but of most of Rhode Island. He must also find replacements for casualties and expired enlistments to keep up the quota of Connecticut troops on the western front. He served at once as quartermaster, commandeering rations and ammunition and horses, and as judge in military cases. A weaker man would have crumpled under this load: Denison met the crisis manfully. His strong partisanship and habit of quick decision, now turned into patriotic channels, served him well. His firm administration of so many serious and delicate problems won praise from everyone. In the field, too, he became a hero.

VII

AFTER the Swamp Fight, Canonchet, the Narragansett chief, came out openly for Philip and the Indian campaign in Rhode Island and eastern Massachusetts was dangerously successful. Not only were Captains Pierce and Wadsworth with fifty Massachusetts men each "swallowed up," as a writer of the times vividly describes their defeats, but in a series of surprise attacks seven villages were burned and their inhabitants slaughtered or scattered.

It was not George Denison's nature to stand guard at the Connecticut border watching this round of disasters. He determined to attack the enemy in the rear.

He enlisted sixty bold volunteers, armed them with a musket and a Cromwellian long sword, mounted them, and reinforced them with a hundred-odd Mohegan and Pequot warriors led by their ablest chief, Oneco. Quickly he moved forty miles into the enemy's country. Here, he halted and holding his little troop of dragoons together, fanned out his red-skinned allies as scouts. As soon as they found a Narragansett camp or located a war party moving stealthily through the scrub oak woods, the English cavalry galloped to an unexpected attack.

Half a dozen such blows and then, before the enemy knew what had happened, the troop was back again at the Pequot-sepos palisade. Captain Denison led three such successful raids with the loss of not a single white trooper and of only five of his Indian allies.

The aging veteran of Cromwell's Ironsides was reviving his youth with gusto. Action, command, danger suited him. He was also enjoying deep satisfactions: the devotion of his men, the admiration of his fellow colonists. He was fighting a good fight, outwitting a crafty enemy, avenging his burnings and massacres, pinning his war parties down so that attacks on the English set-

tlements all but ceased. In this guerilla warfare Denison proved himself a shrewd strategist. Thanks to his Mohegan spies, he perfected his intelligence, and his seemingly rash raids were carefully timed and well planned.

Two winters of the war had passed and with good weather returning, Captain Denison was planning a mop-up campaign. Unexpectedly, his scouts brought him good news. Hard-pressed for food supplies, Canonchet with thirty picked braves planned a foray into the Pawcatuck Valley to get seed corn for the season's planting.

"The Lord," Denison exclaimed, "hath delivered mine enemy into my hands."

Quickly mustering forty-seven Englishmen and about eighty Indians, the Captain crossed the Pawcatuck. Deploying his forces, he advanced to trap the great war-chief between the river and the ocean. Warned of their approach, the Narragansetts scattered and fled.

While slipping around a wooded hill, Canonchet ran into a band of Pequots. Off he darted, a yelling pack after him. He threw away his blanket and his silver-lace coat. Crossing a little stream, he slipped and his gun dropped into the water. It was useless, so he sped on, discarding his heavy belt of wampum, the proud insignia of his rank. As he was struggling through another stream, he was overtaken, tackled and thrown by a young Pequot. Two others hurled themselves upon him: he was a prisoner. The English carried him across the ford and over the hill to the Anguilla plain. Here they halted and held a council to decide his fate.

Canonchet was defiant. He refused to surrender and rejected an armistice. Threatened with death, he courageously replied, "It is well. I shall die before my heart is soft, before I have said anything unworthy of Cananchet to say."

The decision was George Denison's to make and he did not hesitate. Cononchet must die. He should be executed, but without torture, and as befitted a noble chief, at the hands of sachems of his own rank. The order was scrupulously carried out.

It was a harsh judgment; in our eyes, a brutal one. However, both Indians and English were fighting a ruthless war of extermination, and the Captain foresaw truly that the removal of his ablest lieutenant would be a death blow to King Philip's cause.

Leaving their red-skinned allies to celebrate after their fashion with a feast and a dance of victory, the Stonington dragoons rode over the Pequot Trail to their headquarters at Captain Denison's stockade. He dismissed them for the last time: for them, the Narragansett War was over.

VIII

SEVERAL years later the Governor of Massachusetts wrote "The services of the Connecticut men were of great value, those of Captain Denison especially well deserve never to be forgotten." This was indeed "praise from Sir Hubert." In Connecticut, Denison was hailed as the Colony's greatest military leader, second only to Major John Mason of Pequot War fame. His services were tangibly rewarded: the Colony, the Town of Stonington, and his ally Oneco, all made him generous land grants. Loaded with honors he settled down at Pequotsepos to round out the final period of his life a radically changed character.

He "was took into full communion" by the church where his wife had been a member ten years. The Captain did not suddenly "get religion." He had been reared in a faithful Puritan family and had always attended services more or less regularly, but he took no active part in religious affairs nor did he enter in the many sharp conflicts over the fine points of Puritan theol-

ogy. His "conversion" was a declaration of principle; a token, too, of reconcilliation with his neighbors.

He did, however, take a very lively part in town affairs. Aside from his multiple offices during the Massachusetts jurisdiction, he had been the first town clerk of Stonington, serving for three years; magistrate for seven years; selectman, eleven years. He represented Stonington during nineteen sessions of the General Court, almost continuously from 1682 till the second session of 1694, during which he died in Hartford, on October 24, and was buried there—to the very end active in public service.

After the Indian war one of his first acts was to tear down the stockade and house that thirteen years before had replaced his original lean-to. Just to the east he built "my new mansion place," as he describes it in his will, a four-square, center-chimneyed, shingled home. At Pequotsepos Manor, as time went on, Captain George and Lady Ann entertained more and more, visiting celebrities and gave many famous dinner parties, "grate feasts," for their neighbors, his old comrades-in-arms, and to friendly Indian sachems.

By this time the Denison children were grown up and married. Only one had died; Mercy, the youngest, on March 10, 1670, eleven years old. The two daughters of Captain George's first marriage to Bridget Thompson both married sons of Stonington pioneers; Sarah to Thomas Stanton, Jr., and Hannah to Nathaniel Chesebrough. Sarah had seven children: Hannah, eleven; eight by Chesebrough and three daughters by her second husband, Joseph Saxon, a successful Boston merchant, who was a dozen years younger than she. The first-born of Lady Ann's daughters, Ann, married Greshom Palmer, son of the pioneer, Walter. Borodell married Samuel Stanton, the brother of her half sister Sarah's husband. The youngest of the Denison girls was the only one to marry outside of Stonington and move away. Margaret's husband, James Brown, Jr., was from Reho-



THE CIVIL WAR
BEDROOM

both and they lived at Barrington (then in Massachusetts, now Rhode Island).

All three of the Denison sons became important citizens of Stonington. They all saw active service with their father in King Philip's War and each, at various times, represented the town for two or more terms as Deputies to the General Court at Hartford.

Captain John Denison, the oldest, married Phebe Lay of Saybrook. George, Jr., married Mercy Gorham of Barnstable, Massachusetts, a granddaughter of John Howland of the *Mayflower*. William's wife was a daughter of Thomas Stanton (the third Denison-Stanton alliance) and the widow of Thomas Prentice. Quite contrary to English custom, William, the youngest son, inherited Pequotsepos Manor. Captain George divided his property equitably. The older sons were not cut off with the proverbial shilling, and his will provided that his wife shall have use of half of his mansion place so long as she liveth. Possibly William was Lady Ann's favorite son.

In all Captain George and Lady Ann had sixty-four grandchildren. All but eight lived to marry. The third generation was literally a legion. Thus the foundations of the Denisons in the New World were laid down deep and broad.

Captain George's mansion burned in 1717 and on its site his grandson, George III, built the present Denison Homestead.

Love conquering the family feud, he installed here as mistress his bride, pretty Hannah Gallup. In rebuilding the house he certainly followed the original floor plan. It was as standard throughout colonial Connecticut as baked beans and corn pudding. The big charred oak beams he used as part of the frame may well have been salvaged from his grandfather's "mansion place."

Denison tradition and Denison hospitality made this famous house their family headquarters, the great hive from which swarm after swarm of Denison pioneers have left the foreshore of Connecticut. They were seeking bigger, less stony fields. They moved to New York and Boston, to Vermont and York State. They crossed over into Ontario and settled by the score in the Western Reserve (which is now northern Ohio) and they pushed on to Michigan and Kansas and the Dakotas, all the way to the West Coast.

Many of these Denisons continued to farm: many more forsook the harrow and plough. The family produced a Brigadier General for the Canadian Army and the Post Master General in President Lincoln's cabinet, a dozen bank presidents, a manufacturer of bobby pins and a professional tea taster. The stout 900-page *Denison Genealogy* is packed with stories of success in all the learned professions and in every conceivable kind of business enterprise.

For example, the grandson of the George Denison III who built the Homestead was William, born at Pequotsepos. He moved to western Massachusetts, then to Zanesville, Ohio. His son, also William, became one of our first scientific farmers, accumulating a comfortable fortune. It was his gift that rescued the financially distressed Granville Academy and started it towards becoming the great Denison University.

Again, George III's youngest son, David, had a grandson, another David, who was an officer during the Revolution and aft-

erwards moved to Guilford, Vermont. His son, George—literally hundreds of Denison baby boys have been christened George—went to New York City. He studied law, served as a naval officer during the Civil War and was appointed Captain of the Port at New York by Lincoln. With August Belmont and Francis Skiddy he financed the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad. The junction where the "Katy Line's" first machine shops and roundtable were located was named for him, the city of Denison, Texas.

These and similar success stories are typical episodes in that great chapter in American history, the New England Exodus, during which the descendants of the Puritans carried their forefather's ideas and ideals from frontier to frontier across the continent. They were born individualists, these sons of Founding Fathers, and there were rogues and ne'er-do-wells among them. But in the main they were honest, hard-working, self-reliant, God-fearing men, distinguished, above all else, by their faith in democracy and their belief in the value of education. What they contributed to our American way of life is as plain as a-b-c, and as meaningful as two plus two equals four.

IX

MEANWHILE, throughout eleven generations, the Denison Homestead at Pequotsepos and Captain George's original grant of 200 acres, remained in the family. It is owned today by the family association and maintained as a museum. The Denison land is rented by the Denison Society for a dollar a year to the Pequot-sepos Wildlife Sanctuary. Its scientifically labeled nature walks and Trailside Museum are also open to the public.

When, in 1948, the last owner, Mrs. Ann Borodell Denison Gates, bequeathed Pequotsepos Manor to the Denison Society,

Mrs.
STANTON GATES



the trustees found its closets and attics, even a woodshed and the hayloft of the big barn, all crammed with family heirlooms. So they decided to restore the old house in a novel fashion, successively in chronological style. There is the 1717 kitchen, with its big fireplace, crane and trammel, cooking utensils, wooden plates and pewter spoons, on down to Mrs. Gates' own friendly 1900 parlor, with its built-in bookcases and her hospitable tea table complete with silver urn and priceless Dutch china. Across the hall is a formal, panelled drawing room of 1820; upstairs are bedrooms of the Revolutionary and Civil War periods. Each room is scrupulously accurate in every architectural detail and furnished throughout with authentic family relics. Two distinguished experts supervised the creation of this unique museum of American homelife—J. Frederick Kelly, the building and Elizabeth T. Halsey, the furnishings. There is no other old house open to the public like this in all New England.

Like the original Ann Borodell Denison, Mrs. Gates entertained with delight. Almost every afternoon she had guests for five-o'clock tea and her luncheons and dinner parties were fa-

mous. She showed droves of people through the house, pointing out her favorite treasures, the bullet mold and sword of Captain George, the handmade crow decoys and wooden Pequot doll with rabbit-fur hair, the miniature painted on ivory of Lady Ann and the samples of her needlework.

One hot August afternoon, after she had shown three parties everything from cellar to attic, she sat down, tired out, to enjoy a glass of iced tea. Suddenly there was a preemptory rap of the knocker on the front door. She opened it and there stood a tall, red-headed stranger. Her fatigue must have shown, for he said apologetically:

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Gates. It's just another of those damned Denisons come to see your house."

She burst out laughing. "Come in, come in," she chortled. "I'll bet your mother was a Gallup."

"Why she was indeed. But how did you know that?"

"Oh, you said 'damned Denison' so natural."



Biographical Notes

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Connecticut Archives; 196 vols. of scrap books of original documents deposited in State Library, Hartford, by the General Assembly (1900), indexed—of which the more pertinent are *Civil Officers* (1669-1756) 3 vols.; *Indians* (1647-1789) 2 vols.; *Private Controversies* (1642-1716) 6 vols.; *Towns & Lands* (1629-1789) 10 vols., 2nd Series (1649-1820) 5 vols.

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Miner, Sidney H. and Geo. D. Stanton, Jr., editors, *The Diary of Thomas Minor, Stonington, Conn., 1653 to 1684*, privately printed, 1899 and Miner, Frank Denison and Hannah Miner, editors, *The Diary of Manasseh Minor, Stonington, Conn., 1696 to 1720*, privately printed, 1915—these day-by-day records of father and son throw much light on the pioneer settlers’ way of life and contain (especially the former) many references to “the Captain” and his family.

Secondary Source Material:

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with many corrections and much new material added; illustrated and with Denison coat-of-arms in full colors.

Judge Richard Wheeler's *History of the Town of Stonington with Genealogies* (New London, 1900) is still the most detailed account of the settlement of the town and its organization under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts. Despite outmoded approach and style this work is also invaluable for genealogical data on the pioneer families, much of which is unavailable elsewhere.

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The following Conn. Tricentenary Commission Pamphlets are of

interest for background.

XI —Hooker, Roland Mather, *The Boundaries of Connecticut*.

XIX —Spiess, Mathias, *The Indians of Connecticut*.

XXXII—Andrews, Chas. McLean, *The Beginnings of Connecticut*, 1632-1662.

Captain Denison's Petition

To the Honored Generall Court now sitting in Hartford, the humble request of George Denison humbly sheweth:

That whereas about two years since there was a fine imposed upon me by your authority, the which it is at your pleasure ether to remit or require, as you see cause; since which time it has pleased allmighty God in his devine providence, by these unhappy wars, to put an opportunity into my hand, by your authority and comiton, to giue testimony of my fidellitye and readyness to serve the country; wherein I have readily ventured both life and estate for the public interest (not a little to the damage of my weak estate) ye nothing so grievous or difficult but I have bin willing to undergoe and undertake, whereby I might serue God and the interest of his people; especially being countenanced by your authority and incoraged by the preserving and succeeding presence and good hand of the Lord of hosts with us in our weake indevores to the terror and scattering of the enemy; to his glory be it even spoken and kept in memory to his praise. Now may it please you, for to take notis of me, in my weake but faithfull indevors to serve you, as to remit the aforesaid fine imposed upon me; and also to give me those three Indians which Capt. Mason left with me, and have since been confirmed unto me by the counsell at Hartford, to wit, one ancient squa with her husband and her child of about five yeareould, the which is all I have of the effects of the war, either prisoners, plander or incomers. Where by you will yet gurther oblige him to you servive who is, Gentlemen. Yours to Serve in what he may, to his power.

Hartford, May 17, 1677
(Written in his own hand)

George Denison



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